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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 161020985-7181-02]

RIN 0648-XF948

Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Reallocation of Pacific Cod in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; reallocation.

SUMMARY: NMFS is reallocating the projected unused amount of Pacific cod from vessels using jig gear to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters) length overall using hook-and-line or pot gear in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands management area. This action is necessary to allow the A season apportionment of the 2018 total allowable catch of Pacific cod to be harvested.

DATES: Effective January 17, 2018, through 2400 hours, Alaska local time (A.l.t.), December 31, 2018.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Josh Keaton, 907-586-7228.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: NMFS manages the groundfish fishery in the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands (BSAI) according to the Fishery Management Plan for Groundfish of the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Management Area (FMP) prepared by

the North Pacific Fishery Management Council under authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Regulations governing fishing by U.S. vessels in accordance with the FMP appear at subpart H of 50 CFR part 600 and 50 CFR part 679.

The A season apportionment of the 2018 Pacific cod total allowable catch (TAC) specified for vessels using jig gear in the BSAI is 1,529 metric tons (mt) as established by the final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017) and inseason adjustment (82 FR 60329, December 20, 2017).

The 2018 Pacific cod TAC allocated to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 meters(m)) length overall (LOA) using hook-and-line or pot gear in the BSAI is 3,627 mt as established by final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017) and inseason adjustment (82 FR 60329, December 20, 2017).

The Administrator, Alaska Region, NMFS, (Regional Administrator) has determined that jig vessels will not be able to harvest 1,400 mt of the A season apportionment of the 2018 Pacific cod TAC allocated to those vessels under § 679.20(a)(7)(ii)(A)(I). Therefore, in accordance with § 679.20(a)(7)(iv)(C), NMFS apportions 1,400 mt of Pacific cod from the A season jig gear apportionment to the annual amount specified for catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.

The harvest specifications for Pacific cod included in final 2017 and 2018 harvest specifications for groundfish in the BSAI (82 FR 11826, February 27, 2017) and inseason adjustment (82 FR 60329, December 20, 2017) are revised as follows: 129 mt to the A

season apportionment and 1,149 mt to the annual amount for vessels using jig gear, and 5,027 mt to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear.

Classification

This action responds to the best available information recently obtained from the fishery. The Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA (AA), finds good cause to waive the requirement to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth at 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B) as such requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest. This requirement is impracticable and contrary to the public interest as it would prevent NMFS from responding to the most recent fisheries data in a timely fashion and would delay the reallocation of Pacific cod specified from jig vessels to catcher vessels less than 60 feet (18.3 m) LOA using hook-and-line or pot gear. Since the fishery is currently open, it is important to immediately inform the industry as to the revised allocations. Immediate notification is necessary to allow for the orderly conduct and efficient operation of this fishery, to allow the industry to plan for the fishing season, and to avoid potential disruption to the fishing fleet as well as processors. NMFS was unable to publish a notice providing time for public comment because the most recent, relevant data only became available as of January 11, 2018.

The AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effective date of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). This finding is based upon the reasons provided above for waiver of prior notice and opportunity for public comment.

This action is required by § 679.20 and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: January 17, 2018.

Alan D. Risenhoover,

Director,

Office of Sustainable Fisheries,

National Marine Fisheries Service.

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